

ON MY MIND | A. M. Rosen

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Story With No End

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The other day I mentioned to a friend, a journalist, that I was going to take part in a meeting in New York about Raoul Wallenberg. He looked at me in astonishment.

"Wallenberg? The man has been missing for what, 40 years, more — ever since the end of World War II. Nobody lives that long in a Russian prison! What is there to talk about anymore?"

I suppose I looked as astonished as he. I told him that the Wallenberg story kept popping up in my mind because one story or another in the news reminded me of him. We agreed that people have different interests.

That night at the meeting of the Raoul Wallenberg Committee of the United States there were lawyers and bankers and teachers, writers, some men from Wall Street, doctors, retailers, clergymen, about 150 people in all, including a member of Congress and a diplomat representing Carl XVI Gustaf, the King of Sweden.

There were New Yorkers, and men and women from Colorado, Idaho, California and Michigan who belonged to the American group, one of 13 Wallenberg

committees active around the world.

The same day there was a story on the front page of every newspaper that called the name of Wallenberg into the minds of thousands of Americans who read it. The story said that Mikhail Gorbachev would visit the United States in December.

In 1944, Raoul Wallenberg, a young Swede of 32, was asked by American representatives to go to Budapest, there to risk his life every day by trying to snatch Hungarian Jews from the Nazis. German soldiers and Hungarian Fascists were rounding them up to send to slaughter camps.

Wallenberg came from a good family and had a fine education, but there was nothing about him that spoke of the man he was to become in Budapest — a man who by force of his own will did rescue thousands of Jews.

He used only diplomatic status, a little money contributed by American Jews, and a stunningly indomitable will. He hid Jews in houses from which he hung Swedish flags. He marched into knots of Nazi kidnappers crying, "Ich bin Wallenberg," as if that would make them fall back. Sometimes it did.

Hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews were murdered by the Germans. Wallenberg saved thousands. To them and to their sons and

daughters, and to millions of people around the world for whom the Holocaust is eternal, Wallenberg is an almost mystical reminder of what one decent, brave person can do, just one.

In January 1945, the Russians entered Budapest. Wallenberg went to meet them and disappeared. For years, the Russians said they had no idea where he was.

In 1957, Andrei A. Gromyko, then a deputy foreign minister and later President of the Soviet Union, said yes, Wallenberg had been imprisoned out had died in a Soviet jail in 1947 and that there were no documents or witnesses remaining. From that day to this the Soviet Government has added no further information.

So far three decades, no real news. But the Wallenberg movement is as alive as ever, for two reasons. One is hope. Nobody wants to say it is gone. There are many who cling hard to the belief he is alive and meticulously try to track down reports that he has been seen in one Soviet prison or another.

The other, far stronger, is the determination not to do to Wallenberg what he refused to do to the Jews of Hungary — turn away.

For the people in every part of the world, Wallenberg becomes part of every story that has to do with brave men and women willing to

sacrifice life or liberty for others. Andrei Sakharov visits the United States and his very presence somehow freshens the name of Wallenberg and the march.

The United States Senate honors a Polish Jew called Raphael Lemkin, almost 30 years after his death in New York. It puts into law the genocide convention to which he devoted his life. Thought association: Wallenberg and Lemkin fought murder, each in his own way.

Now there is a Wallenberg story of another kind — Mr. Gorbachev's visit. Will it finally fulfill the hopes that he would uncover and reveal the full story of Raoul Wallenberg or allow an international commission to try?

The responsibility to reply belongs to Mr. Gorbachev. The responsibility to ask the question belongs to those who meet with him. President Reagan and President-elect Bush will have the chance. So will the American press — public questions requiring public answers, an opportunity for journalists and a far greater one for the leader of the Soviet Union.

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